

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE

April 29, 2021

8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Sara Hannan, Co-Chair
Representative Calvin Schrage, Co-Chair
Representative Josiah Patkotak, Vice Chair
Representative Harriet Drummond
Representative Mike Prax
Representative Ken McCarty
Representative Kevin McCabe

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 16

"An Act relating to the right of first refusal of a volunteer search and rescue group with respect to surplus state property."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 11

"An Act relating to assault in the third and fourth degrees; and relating to reckless endangerment."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 16

SHORT TITLE: SEARCH AND RESCUE SURPLUS STATE PROPERTY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) JOHNSON

02/18/21	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
02/18/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21	(H)	CRA, STA
04/27/21	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
04/27/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/27/21	(H)	MINUTE (CRA)
04/29/21	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HB 11

SHORT TITLE: DEFENSIVE DISPLAY OF FIREARM

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) RAUSCHER

02/18/21	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/21
02/18/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/18/21	(H)	CRA, STA, JUD
04/27/21	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124
04/27/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/27/21	(H)	MINUTE(CRA)
04/29/21	(H)	CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

WITNESS REGISTER

GEOFF LARSON, President
Southeast Alaska Dogs Organized for Ground Search (SEADOGS)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 16.

AOIBHEANN CLINE, ESQ, Alaska State Director
National Rifle Association
Fairfax, Virginia

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 11.

JOYANNE BLOOM, Volunteer
Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 11.

LUANN MCVEY, Volunteer
Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 11.

MIKE COONS
Palmer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 11.

ROCHELLE PARKER, Volunteer
Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 11.

POLLY CARR
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 11.

PATTY OWEN, Volunteer
Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 11.

ROZLYN WYCHT
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 11.

LISA IDELL-SASSI
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 11.

LOUIE FLORA
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 11.

ARI SASSI
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 11.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:02:07 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR CALVIN SCHRAGE called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives McCabe, Drummond, Patkotak, Hannan, and Schrage were present at the call to order. Representatives McCarty and Prax arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 16-SEARCH AND RESCUE SURPLUS STATE PROPERTY

[8:02:50 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 16, "An Act relating to the right of first refusal of a volunteer search and rescue group with respect to surplus state property." [Before the committee was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 16, Version 32-LS0128\B, Bannister, 4/19/21, ("Version B"), adopted as a work draft on 4/27/21.]

[8:02:53 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE opened public testimony on HB 16.

[8:03:05 AM](#)

GEOFF LARSON, President, Southeast Alaska Dogs Organized for Ground Search (SEADOGS), said SEADOGS has existed for approximately 40 years; it is an all-volunteer team utilizing dogs "to search and recover lost and missing." He said SEADOGS are called out by the Alaska State Troopers. He stated support for HB 16, which he said would aid teams like SEADOGS in the efforts to support the Alaska State Troopers when called. Mr. Larson stated that access to obsolete or surplus state property would serve as a tool in SEADOGS' quest "to always be ready for the call." Currently, he said, SEADOGS uses its own boats and equipment in searches, which means equipment is often in the field being used by another team member and, thus, not readily accessible. Further, he noted that many of the team members are commercial fisherman, who need their boats during fishing season. If possible, SEADOGS would keep available equipment ready for search and rescue missions. He expressed that SEADOGS sees value in HB 16 and urges committee members to pass the bill out of committee.

[8:05:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 16.

[HB 16 was set aside and brought back before the committee later in the meeting.]

HB 11-DEFENSIVE DISPLAY OF FIREARM

[8:06:06 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE announced that the next order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 11, "An Act relating to assault in the third and fourth degrees; and relating to reckless endangerment."

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE opened public testimony on HB 11.

[8:06:32 AM](#)

AOIBHEANN CLINE, ESQ, Alaska State Director, National Rifle Association, testified in support of HB 11. She said the proposed legislation would clarify Alaska law to allow Alaskans "to protect themselves in situations" by allowing them to "defensively display a firearm." She said self-defense situations are not "cut and dry," and HB 11 would provide

Alaskans with "resources and tools to display and thwart attacks." She said defensive display of firearms laws exist in Arizona, Iowa, Montana, and Oklahoma. She said Oklahoma is enhancing language in 2021 "to allow law-abiding citizens to protect themselves." She opined that it is time for Alaska to allow its citizens to do the same "in self-defense situations." She urged the committee to support HB 11.

8:07:47 AM

JOYANNE BLOOM, Volunteer, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter, said at the sight of a gun, she changes, because "something bad is going to happen" regardless of her choice between flight or fight. She opined that HB 11 is a bad idea, "a dangerous free pass to use and brandish firearms recklessly and for the purpose of intimidation with no consequences." She said, "This is not how responsible gun owners behave, and it should not be allowed in Alaska." Ms. Bloom said Alaska has the highest rate of gun deaths in the U.S., and HB 11 does nothing to address that issue. She likened that to adding dry kindling to a fire. She expressed that as a woman, mother, and grandmother, she is afraid, and she does not want to see guns in her neighborhood or for her offspring to see guns "carried in the open in threatening ways." She advocated for responsible gun owners to continue "to keep their guns locked, away from children, and out of sight."

8:09:34 AM

LUANN MCVEY, Volunteer, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter, testified in opposition to HB 11. She stated that the presence of firearms often exacerbates conflict; guns are often too quickly used to cause devastating harm that could be avoided by deescalating a situation through mutual respect and negotiation. She shared a situation in which her neighbor set off fireworks, resulting in a fire in front of her house. She said angry words were exchanged, and a day later a resolution had been reached. She speculated as to a more lethal result if she had brought a firearm into the exchange instead of addressing the issue verbally. Ms. McVey opined that HB 11 is unnecessary, because Alaska law already protects people with "an authentic reason to defend themselves." She added, "Most people are not likely to be in a situation where they need to use a gun to defend themselves." She urged the committee not to pass HB 11 out of committee.

8:11:31 AM

MIKE COONS testified in support of HB 11. He said the previous speaker would have been arrested if she had brought a firearm into the situation she described. He related that he has presented a firearm four times to stop criminal action that put his own life and the lives of others in danger, and he described instances where the presence of his firearm deescalated situations. He said he has never had to pull the trigger, but use of a weapon has stopped life-threatening situations. He said he carries a concealed weapon, has undergone [firearms] training, and is aware of the law. He opined that it is wrong to arrest a person for displaying a weapon when in fear of his/her life. He asked the committee to pass [HB 11] out of committee.

8:14:10 AM

ROCHELLE PARKER, Volunteer, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter, testified in opposition to HB 11. She said the proposed legislation would state that displaying a firearm can never be considered reckless conduct or categorized as a third or fourth degree assault. She said this would allow gun owners to brandish firearms carelessly for the purpose of intimidation and with no consequences. Ms. Parker said introducing a firearm, whether fired or not, rarely deescalates a volatile situation; conversely, research shows that displaying firearms makes people more aggressive, which could create substantial risk of injury. She said that under HB 11, an angry driver could waive a firearm during a traffic dispute, which could cause a collision. A person could display a firearm in a crowd, resulting in panic ending in injury or tragedy. Ms. Parker said roughly 4.5 million women alive today have been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner, which has lead to those women experiencing more severe psychological symptoms. She opined that considering the frequency of mass shootings reported in the news, it is reckless and unsafe to give gun owners the right to irresponsibly exhibit their firearms in public or private spaces.

8:16:11 AM

POLLY CARR testified in opposition to HB 11, calling it legislation that would normalize the use of guns for intimidation purposes. She said as a mother she does not want to see people displaying firearms at events to which she brings her 10-year-old daughter. She said she thinks it is "a direct threat to safety of all." She relayed that intimidation tactics

with guns have been used both historically and currently to threaten people, particularly people of color, at events. She said this happened in Anchorage and Palmer during peaceful "Black Lives Matter" rallies, at which others showed up with rifles and semi-automatic weapons, the effect of which was "chilling and psychologically terrifying for many." She said she views HB 11 as another attempt to suppress civic engagement. She said HB 11 would allow a person to display a firearm to dissuade a threatening person. She stated, "The current political climate has been made increasingly violent as an outcome of years of public manipulation by partisan media and certain political figures." She said many believe that those who disagree with those people are perceived as a threat. She referred to the events of January 6, 2021, at the White House. She said HB 11 has the potential to increase violence at public events, is "a solution in search of a problem," and, if passed, would create severe impacts to democracy, public safety, and society. She asked the committee not to pass HB 11 out of committee.

8:18:20 AM

PATTY OWEN, Volunteer, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Alaska Chapter, testified in opposition to HB 11. She opined, "No responsible gun owner should have to think twice about the danger involved in waiving a gun in the air." She questioned why anyone would think it was okay to brandish a gun in a state where aggravated assaults with a gun have increased by an average of 65 percent a year since 2003 and fire arms are the leading cause of death among children and teenagers. She said brandishing a gun endangers all who are in the vicinity, including the person with the gun, especially considering Alaska's "Stand Your Ground" law. Ms. Owen said that in a state with no apparent gun safety laws, it is no wonder that Alaska has the highest rate of gun deaths in the country. She said Alaska's gun laws have become more lenient, while the rate of gun deaths has increased by almost 20 percent. As an example, she noted Alaska once required a permit for concealed carry but now allows a person to carry concealed without a permit or training. She talked about protecting Alaskans from gun deaths and injuries, which she said are preventable. She concluded that "doing nothing is the slippery slope to increase tragedy."

8:20:21 AM

ROZLYN WYCHT stated that she was testifying as a Black woman in opposition to HB 11. She noted the number of Black relatives

and friends she has and spoke to recent actions being taken in America and expressed that there is "a lot of fear going on." She said she was at the Black Lives Matter rally in Palmer and expressed there was fear resulting from the men, most of them White, walking around carrying guns. She said she listened to President Biden and learned that over 50 women are killed each month by guns. She said she knows that domestic violence is "huge" in Alaska. She questioned who is not at risk from someone brandishing a weapon, including her children, who may be walking home from the store and be in fear from a neighbor who walks outside wearing a gun, and things "go south" because of fear. Ms. Wycht explained she is not against guns but thinks "we need to think this through and have more conversation on it."

8:22:36 AM

LISA IDELL-SASSI testified in support of HB 11. She said she thinks it is "our constitutional right to protect ourselves," and most people who carry a gun have a lot of training, acquire a concealed carry permit, and are responsible gun owners. She said opposing HB 11 would result in more guns carried by criminals on the street and penalize law-abiding citizens.

8:23:21 AM

LOUIE FLORA noted that although he is director of Government Affairs for the Alaska Center, he was testifying on his own behalf as "gun owner, parent, and lifelong Alaskan." He stated opposition to HB 11 in the context of the current political environment, as "it appears to increase the use of guns as both political statement and actual threat to the life and safety of political opponents." He stated he also opposes HB 11 because Alaska leads the nation in the number of gun deaths per capita, and he predicted the proposed legislation would make that statistic worse. He stated a further reason for his opposition to HB 11 was because "the display of guns is associated with voter suppression - especially voter suppression against people of color." Mr. Flora also pointed out that HB 11 had not been analyzed by state and local public safety agencies to determine how its passage could impact law enforcement activities.

8:24:27 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked Mr. Flora to name his source for the statistic about Alaska leading the nation in gun deaths, and he

asked for information regarding the types of crime the gun deaths included.

MR. FLORA answered that he had done research on the Internet yesterday and found the information on Bloomberg. He indicated it was in the context of Alaska's high epidemic of suicide. He said he would send the information to the committee.

[8:25:34 AM](#)

ARI SASSI testified that as a proponent of concealed and open carry and someone who has done both, he supported HB 11. He indicated that he has not heard any corroborating evidence to support the statements made by some of the previous speakers, including the issue of the number of gun deaths in Alaska.

[8:26:31 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 11.

[HB 11 was held over.]

[8:26:38 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 8:26 a.m. to 8:29 a.m.

HB 16-SEARCH AND RESCUE SURPLUS STATE PROPERTY

[8:28:58 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE announced that the final order of business would be a return to HOUSE BILL NO. 16, "An Act relating to the right of first refusal of a volunteer search and rescue group with respect to surplus state property." [Before the committee was CS for HB 16, Version 32-LS0128\B, Bannister, 4/19/21, ("Version B").]

[8:29:09 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE moved to adopt Amendment 1 to HB 16, Version B, which read as follows:

Page 1, lines 4 - 6:
Delete all material.

Page 1, line 7:

Delete "**Sec. 2**"
Insert "**Section 1**"

[8:29:18 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE objected for discussion purposes.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE spoke to Amendment 1. He said it would remove a reference to a short title, which he said was not appropriate in HB 16 and should probably have been removed before the bill was offered.

[8:30:17 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR SCHRAGE removed his objection to the motion to adopt Amendment 1. There being no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[HB 16 was held over.]

[8:30:35 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 8:31 a.m.